

THE ISAF COALITION: ACHIEVING U.S. OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN?

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE ISAF COALITION: ACHIEVING U.S. OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN?

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ABSTRACT

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The profuse nature of the threats in the current international environment and the global responsibilities of the United States dictate that in order to achieve its “ends,” the United States should fight within the context of alliances and coalitions to provide effective “ways” and sufficient “means.” In his December 2009 speech, President Obama renewed this commitment to work with allies and partners in Afghanistan. However, because of the challenges of multilateralism, many in the United States question whether or not the broad coalition is the optimum, or even appropriate, way to proceed. Using counterinsurgency doctrine, this paper analyzes whether or not the use of the NATO alliance in the ISAF coalition is the best way for the United States to achieve its objectives. This study suggests that it is.

THE ISAF COALITION: ACHIEVING U.S. OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN?

The United States alliance system has been a cornerstone of peace and security... contributing significantly to achieving all U.S. objectives.¹

—Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense

The International Operating Environment

In 1991, the dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the international environment and ushered in an era of persistent conflict where the United States struggles against the threat of extremism, the quest by rogue states for nuclear weapons and the rise of military power of other states.² The profuse nature of these threats and the international responsibilities of the United States dictate that in order to achieve its “ends,” the United States should fight within the context of alliances and coalitions to provide effective “ways” and sufficient “means.”³

In his December 2009 speech at the United States Military Academy at West Point, President Obama stated that the objectives of the United States in Afghanistan are to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and its allies in the future.⁴ To accomplish these aims, the United States has pledged to work with allies and partners to reverse the momentum of the Taliban and their ability to overthrow the government of Afghanistan and deny Al Qaeda safe-havens.⁵ This suggests that the best way to achieve these goals is the continued use of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition. However, because of the challenges of multilateralism, many in the United States question whether or not the broad coalition is the optimum, or even appropriate, way to proceed. Applying three core counterinsurgency criteria, this paper evaluates the

cost / benefit of current efforts to defeat the insurgency in Afghanistan. It also evaluates the options of acting unilaterally or through a more limited coalition. Finally, it presents conclusions and recommendations that may be instructive as to whether large coalitions are a suitable, feasible, and acceptable way to achieve the broader global interests of the United States.

Insurgency

U.S. Joint doctrine defines insurgency as an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.⁶ Insurgent groups exploit geographic, political or social conditions to establish safe havens from which they can operate with impunity in order to undermine government capacity to provide stability and security.⁷ The focus of an insurgency is to gain and maintain legitimacy and influence over the population through political, psychological, informational, military and economic methods with the aim of forcing political change.⁸ While the government normally has the advantage in resources, this edge is counterbalanced by the requirements to maintain order and protect the population.⁹ “Insurgents succeed by introducing chaos and disorder anywhere; the government fails unless it maintains a degree of order everywhere.”¹⁰

Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency (COIN) has once again become an important competency for the United States military because the United States, by virtue of its demonstrated dominance in nuclear and conventional capability, has driven potential opponents to embrace irregular warfare, including insurgency, as their only viable method to victory.¹¹ The primary objective of counterinsurgency is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government.¹² According to GEN Petraeus, defeating an

insurgency requires a comprehensive, patient, unified, culturally savvy, whole-of-government approach that fully integrates military and non-military efforts putting a premium on unity of effort at all levels and with all participants.¹³ Because insurgencies are protracted by nature, COIN operations demand considerable expenditures of time and resources.¹⁴ In order for counterinsurgency to succeed, therefore, it must be adequately resourced, both civilly and militarily, and at all levels. In short, three counterinsurgency criteria are essential for success:

- a. Creating a legitimate host nation government
- b. Crafting civil-military unity of effort in combating insurgency
- c. Generating adequate resources to wage a successful counterinsurgency campaign

Legitimacy

Legitimacy in the context of counterinsurgency is the establishment of an effective and legitimate indigenous government competent to secure its people and provide for their essential needs; it is the single most important aspect of counterinsurgency.¹⁵ All governments rule through a combination of consent and coercion. Legitimate governments rule primarily with the consent of the governed while illegitimate ones tend to rule based on fear of the consequences.¹⁶ Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24 outlines six possible indicators of host government legitimacy that can be used to determine success:¹⁷

- The ability to provide security for the populace (including protection from internal and external threats)
- Selection of leaders at a frequency and in a manner considered just and fair by a substantial majority of the populace

- A high level of popular participation in or support for political processes
- A culturally acceptable level of corruption
- A culturally acceptable level and rate of political, economic, and social development
- A high level of regime acceptance by major social institutions

Governments scoring high in these categories probably have the support of the majority of the population. Of caution, however, is the realization that different cultures have different tolerance levels for corruption, violence, and services. COIN forces must understand what legitimacy means to the host nation population and not attempt to view it through their own values or cultural bias.¹⁸ In addition, COIN forces must build a capable host nation government that is legitimate in the eyes of regional and international partners.

Unity of Effort

Joint Publication 3-0 (Joint Operations) defines unity of effort as “coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not...part of the same command or organization...”¹⁹ FM 3-24 suggests all organizations contributing to a COIN operation should strive for maximum unity of effort by having a clear understanding of the desired end state.²⁰ Unity of effort includes those principles involved in integrating the activities of military and civilian organizations and must be present at every echelon of a COIN operation.²¹ Integrated civil-military actions, also known as the whole-of-government approach, are therefore essential to defeating the ideologies professed by insurgents but difficult to achieve for several reasons.²²

First, unity of effort requires the efficient integration of all aspects of power (diplomatic, informational, military and economic) from organizations that differ greatly in

culture and perspective.²³ This means a nation's bureaucracy must work efficiently to successfully counter an insurgency. Achieving this in the context of a comprehensive, unified multi-national, multi-organizational effort is exponentially more complex because it requires working with many bureaucracies on many levels.

Second, the sheer number of tasks and players involved in counterinsurgency is overwhelming. Successful counterinsurgency likely includes host nation (HN) military and civil agencies (including local leaders), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), multinational corporations and contractors, and supporting civil and military organizations (including multinational).²⁴ Tasks include efforts to improve government, education, health care, economic development, environmental protection, human rights and conflict resolution as well as assisting the host nation military in offensive, defensive and stability operations.²⁵

Third, given the number of participants in COIN, the results of decision-making are often pre-approved and inflexible policies that generally provide unity effort but do not allow counterinsurgent forces the ability to react to dynamic changes in the environment.²⁶ Executing a flexible strategy is therefore complicated and places strain on unity of effort. As circumstances change, disunity among counterinsurgent efforts results in de-synchronization. Failure to achieve unity of effort produces well-intentioned but uncoordinated actions that can cancel each other or provide vulnerabilities for insurgents to exploit.²⁷

Adequate Resources

Closely linked to legitimacy and unity of effort is the need for adequate resources. Executing a well-developed, unified, counterinsurgency strategy is crucial but unlikely without adequate resources for success. As noted above,

counterinsurgency tasks include separating insurgents from the population, securing the borders to prevent insurgent sanctuary or re-supply, and building effective host nation security forces. They entail providing essential services such as water, electricity, education, health services, developing effective governmental institutions and developing an effective host nation economy.²⁸ These considerable requirements necessitate an adequate combination of civilian and military host nation, international, and / or non-governmental resources applied over the long term. Without them, counterinsurgency cannot succeed.

Historic Illustration

France's counterinsurgency experience in Algeria can be used to illustrate the importance of all three COIN elements in achieving strategic success. The Front de Liberation Naitonale (FLN) waged an anti colonial struggle against the French in Algeria from 1954–1962. Begun by educated Algerian Arabs as a political movement to pursue self-rule, by 1957 the FLN developed into a full-scale insurgent movement to force political change.²⁹ To counter this movement, the French employed and adequately resourced a unified civil-military counterinsurgency strategy aimed at obtaining the support of the population and preventing outside support to the FLN.³⁰

French civil authorities provided humanitarian assistance to local Muslim communities, protected those who sided with the army, and guaranteed that the colony would eventually be recognized as a constituent part of the French Republic.³¹ French military efforts included the sizeable deployment of 450,000 troops to Algeria which enabled control of the borders to prevent FLN movement from sanctuaries outside of the country and the protection of the population by moving millions of Arab Muslims from zones of guerrilla activity into protected camps.³² Having successfully applied the

counterinsurgency tenets of a well-resourced and unified civil-military strategy, the French strangled the FLN politically and militarily and reestablished a secure environment for the population, winning tactical and operational victories.³³

However, in their enthusiasm to defeat FLN, the French Army failed to achieve legitimacy, especially among the French people. The primary reason France lacked legitimacy was that its tactics to end terrorism were brutal, particularly in the Algerian capital, Algiers. The Army used torture indiscriminately as a way to gain information from terror suspects. By 1958, French public agitation over the highly-charged issue of torture led political leaders to seek accommodation with the FLN. By 1959, despite the military destruction of the FLN, President de Gaulle decided Algeria was too expensive to retain, financially and politically, and moved Algeria towards independence.³⁴ Despite a well-resourced and unified civil-military counterinsurgency effort, French failure to establish legitimacy led to the strategic victory by the FLN and the independence of Algeria.

The ISAF Coalition 2001-2009

Having established the importance of legitimacy, unity of effort, and adequate resources in COIN, they can now be examined in the historical context of ISAF's mission in Afghanistan. In 2001, ISAF deployed under the authority given it by the United Nations (UN) Security Council as a mission to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas. Between December 2001 and February 2003, ISAF was governed by three separate UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) and commanded by three headquarters lead by separate nations rotating every six months. At that time, ISAF had no command relationship with U.S. forces operating as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) making unity of

command impossible. This problem was remedied in April 2003 when the UN expanded the mandate to make NATO overall responsible for the command, coordination and planning of the force, including the provision of a force commander and headquarters on the ground in Afghanistan. After taking control, the Alliance expanded operations in four stages but command and control and unity of effort continued to be challenged by six month rotations of the ISAF headquarters.³⁵

The North Atlantic Council (NAC) authorized stage one of the expansion of ISAF in December 2003. In this stage, NATO moved into the northern areas of the country with predominately French and German troops. They also created Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to extend the authority of the Afghan central government into the countryside, provide security, and undertake projects including infrastructure development.³⁶ At the same time, the U.S. had 67,000 troops committed in Iraq. Stage two began in 2005 when NATO moved into western Afghanistan with largely Spanish and Italian forces. This coincided with a substantial U.S. expansion in Iraq to almost 144,000 ground troops.³⁷ Stage three began in July 2006 with U.S., Dutch, British and Canadian forces moving into the south of Afghanistan.³⁸ Stage three heralded the divergence of views within the Alliance on the strategy to accomplish the mission. This divergence of views not only resulted in the proliferation of restrictions known as “caveats” but also impacted unity of effort and the perceived legitimacy of the ISAF mission.³⁹ In October 2006, ISAF implemented the final stage of its expansion by taking on command of the international military forces in eastern Afghanistan from the US-led Coalition bringing 650,000 square kilometers and 64,000 Soldiers under its responsibility.⁴⁰ This move coincided with the announcement by President Bush in

January 2007 to send an additional five U.S. combat brigades to Iraq for a temporary surge resulting in some 158,000 troops on the ground in Iraq.⁴¹ Without the resources provided by NATO and other troop contributing nations, the U.S. would have had a difficult time meeting obligations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

ISAF Today

Before examining the tenets of COIN in detail, it is useful to explain why unity of effort is difficult to achieve in ISAF. To begin, the ISAF chain of command begins with the North Atlantic Council based in Brussels, Belgium and with equal representation from each of the 28 NATO nations. Based on the political guidance handed down from the NAC, strategic military command and control of ISAF is exercised through Allied Command Operations (ACO) and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), a U.S. general officer based in Mons, Belgium. SACEUR is also dual-hatted as the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) Commander. This fact hinders unity of effort as it is the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), not EUCOM that is responsible for Afghanistan as outlined in the Unified Command Plan (UCP) of the United States. Finally, the operational command for ISAF is Joint Forces Command (JFC), Brunssum, Netherlands, one of SACEUR's three major subordinate commands. JFC Brunssum is responsible for staffing, deploying and sustaining the ISAF mission and is lead by a German general officer. Given the constraints on sharing information in multilateral environments, this arrangement ensures ISAF's operational command has less situational awareness on operations than its higher headquarters at SHAPE, adding to the challenges of achieving unity of effort.

Next, despite a NATO chain of command, all 43 of the ISAF national contingents also report directly to their national command authorities. These authorities often

impose restrictions known as “national caveats” on tasks their forces may undertake.⁴²

These restrictions include prohibiting forces from conducting combat operations, preventing their moving outside of Forward Operating Bases, or requiring their forces operate in certain areas. Caveats present significant challenges to U.S. and coalition commanders who find themselves obliged to influence, rather than command, the forces in their charge. Caveats add considerable complexity to achieving unity of command and limit the “means” provided to the force commander.

Finally, at the core of the ISAF mission are PRTs. PRTs assist ISAF in establishing legitimacy by producing a culturally acceptable level and rate of political, economic and social development throughout Afghanistan. They also assist the Afghan government by providing a high level of regime acceptance by major social institutions. Individual PRTs are sponsored, established and executed by individual nations and their function is important in this discussion because they represent opportunity for true civil-military integration and unity of effort. Unfortunately, there is no established model or doctrine for PRTs, an additional consequence of the cultural complexity and divergent national views of the ISAF mission. U.S. PRTs are well-resourced and comprised of both U.S. and Afghan military and civilian agencies that focus on reconstruction but have the ability to provide security and respond aggressively to threats.⁴³ In contrast, non-U.S. PRTs are often ill-funded, tend to lack purpose and direction and are often ineffective.⁴⁴ Given their wide-ranging capacities/performance and each nation’s cultural proclivities, PRTs present significant challenges to U.S. and coalition commanders working to achieve civil-military unity of effort.

Does ISAF Enhance or Hinder U.S. Efforts?

Fighting the insurgency in Afghanistan as a broad coalition provides significant legitimacy. The number of nations and variety of cultures involved can be viewed, internationally, as sufficient to oversee an honest political process to create a legitimate government. Sponsorship by NATO supports legitimacy because, among other things, its consensus requirement for decision-making provides a strong organizational structure for debating and reaching decisions on ISAF policies.⁴⁵ While cumbersome, this works to enhance the quality of the decision and increases the acceptability and legitimacy of the ISAF mission among the populations of the Alliance and throughout the world.⁴⁶ Additionally, the consensus provision places organizational constraints on the immediate use of force. As an example, civilian casualties, as noted by GEN McChrystal, have severely damaged ISAF's legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people.⁴⁷ The deliberate decision-making process improves the chances of the appropriate use of force and helps ISAF avoid perceived brutality that undermined French efforts in Algeria.

Within Central Asia, the representation of 43 nations in the coalition acts as a considerable and legitimate voice and significant lever in shaping the Afghan government. The comprehensive nature of ISAF also enhances the ability to influence the governments of Pakistan, Iran and others in the region important to U.S. and allied desire for regional stabilization. Internal to Afghanistan, the ability to create an honest and legitimate political process that includes the periodic transfer of authority, as outlined in FM 3-24, will likely be considered just and fair by the Afghan people. ISAF contributes to the acceptance of a legitimate government by helping the Afghan government, through PRTs, provide services, and economic and social development.

Within the U.S., the broad ISAF coalition is seen by the American people as legitimate, and therefore acceptable. Multilateral authorization for the use of force confers a degree of legitimacy required by the American public.⁴⁸ This positively affects the national will needed to sustain a long counterinsurgency campaign. Similarly, sponsorship by NATO provides governments within the Alliance the domestic political leverage to sell ISAF participation to their home constituencies.

Burden-sharing has always been a central issue in NATO and often a point of friction. Burden-sharing can be defined as, “the distribution of costs and risks among members of a group in the process of accomplishing a common goal.”⁴⁹ The broad ISAF coalition has the potential to provide a significant amount of manpower, intelligence, and other resources necessary to sustain the conflict over time and to build a legitimate government in Afghanistan. ISAF not only provides resources to accomplish the mission, it reduces the cost load on the United States. Significantly, about half of the over 84,000 troops and the majority of the PRTs in ISAF come from nations other than the U.S.⁵⁰ Importantly, this includes resources and support to training and building the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) allowing the Afghan government to provide security for the populace. This is fundamental for the government to be viewed as legitimate by the population. So, without the resources provided by the other 42 nations in Afghanistan, the U.S. would be hard-pressed to muster sufficient resources to achieve success.

Despite these advantages, the broad coalition causes significant risks. As noted, unity of effort is one of the most important tenets of fighting an insurgency. Fundamentally, despite their agreement on the desire to stabilize the country to prevent

the return of a terrorist state (“ends”), not all ISAF or NATO participants share the priorities, “ways,” and/or “means” of the U.S.⁵¹ For example, some allied governments believe that poor governance, rather than an insurgency, is the principal problem impeding stabilization of the country.⁵² There have also been significant differences over how to deal with the Afghan narcotics industry known to finance the insurgency.⁵³

In order to obtain consensus from 28 NATO nations to conduct an operation or modify policy, the U.S. consistently expends significant political capital and time and often is forced to cooperate to the lowest-common-denominator.⁵⁴ The consequences of lengthy discussions and compromise include inflexible policies that do not allow COIN forces to respond dynamically to the changing operating environment. It also results in diluted mandates to operational commanders who then have to deal with national caveats and forces who also report to their national command authorities.⁵⁵ This may lead to a longer conflict with greater cost.

Finally, the diversity of ISAF makes it culturally complex and difficult to achieve unity of effort. Differences in national doctrines, languages, and cultures often cause ruptures in understanding and the ability to effectively communicate.⁵⁶ But there are great advantages to this cultural diversity, like the ability to gain a better understanding of the core sources of the insurgency and greater facility to innovate and problem solve. In sum, ISAF may not be the optimal way to provide the unity of effort necessary for success in Afghanistan.

Should the U.S. Act Unilaterally?

A senior U.S. military commander observed in early 2009 that unity of effort is the most serious problem facing Afghanistan. He noted that, “It’s not security. It’s the utter failure in the unity of effort department.”⁵⁷ Getting multiple international organizations,

nations and agencies pulling in the same direction is a monumental challenge.⁵⁸

Organizational studies have shown that homogeneous groups often outperform diverse groups.⁵⁹ Since unity of effort is critical in a counterinsurgency, fighting unilaterally might be a better course of action for the United States. The U.S. has recent success in developing counterinsurgency doctrine and has promoted senior leaders who embrace it. The President has approved a population-centric counterinsurgency in Afghanistan that will allow the execution of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine. Moreover, NATO does not have an agreed upon COIN doctrine. Acting unilaterally, the U.S. could implement its COIN doctrine with greater unity of effort, purpose and will. A unilateral force has lessened interoperability challenges, due to compatible equipment and culture, and can share information generally without constraints. A unilateral force has greater tactical and operational flexibility because it is not hindered by the monumental complexity broad coalitions introduce.

However, fighting unilaterally would introduce significant risk, in terms of acceptability and feasibility, to achieving the objectives of the United States in Afghanistan. Without the legitimacy that the ISAF coalition provides, the U.S. would find itself isolated from, and criticized by, the rest of the world. It would also be hard pressed to showcase the Afghan government as legitimate, both to internal and external audiences. Fighting unilaterally would deny the United States the cultural diversity of input at all levels of the operation. Cultural knowledge is essential to waging a successful counterinsurgency and being seen as legitimate.⁶⁰ Without the coalition, U.S. leaders might increasingly lose the support of the American people for current objectives in Afghanistan.

NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan currently includes 43 Troop Contributing Nations (TCNs) divided into 5 Regional Commands (RCs) and 26 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).⁶¹ Without ISAF, the US would lose the over 38,000 troops serving with the U.S. today and other corresponding resources. This would not only impact the ability to fight offensively and defensively but also to execute long term stability and reconstruction operations.⁶² Without the ability to share the burden, the U.S. would likely find itself unable to achieve success.

Form a Coalition of the Willing?

Another option might be to rely on a coalition of the willing. This could provide some of the advantages of a broader coalition (including legitimacy and burden-sharing), while potentially improving the ability to fight and work together efficiently. The United States would achieve greater unity of effort by forming a small coalition of trusted states that share common views of “ends,” “ways” and “means.” Ideally, these nations would have experience fighting together, possess information and intelligence sharing agreements, and share a common system of language, values, and culture.

A limited coalition has the potential to be viewed by the host nation and internationally as providing legitimacy providing it has outside endorsement, such as from the United Nations. Domestically, a limited coalition is preferable to acting unilaterally as it attains a degree of legitimacy required by the American people. A limited coalition would provide additional resources and burden-sharing for the counterinsurgency effort, thus reducing some of the costs to the United States while providing resources for counterinsurgency. Finally, the limited coalition would provide some cultural diversity helpful in achieving a deeper understanding of the Afghan

culture and developing an effective information campaign important to maintaining legitimacy and winning the war of ideas.

This option, however, like fighting unilaterally, has the risk of being too small to realize any real domestic or international legitimacy. It might also be unable to provide adequate resources or burden-sharing to sustain a long campaign. Without a NATO mandate or presence, many of the current NATO troop contributing nations would find it difficult to justify a continued military presence given declining approval ratings at home. In particular, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy have used the NATO brand to justify the commitment of over 15,000 troops and/or other resources to ISAF. Loss of NATO involvement might cost ISAF thousands of troops and other critical resources, and would likely lead to the withdrawal of other troop contributing nations and their resources.

Moreover, the limited coalition would not provide sufficient cultural diversity needed to provide legitimacy as it would more than likely include only western, English-speaking nations where trust and interoperability are already established. Finally, a limited coalition would disenfranchise the dozens of nations willing to participate and desiring to express their support for the United States and Afghanistan. In short, a limited coalition is unlikely to offer sufficient legitimacy or adequate resources while retaining most of the disadvantages of acting unilaterally.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The ISAF coalition in Afghanistan, while having its drawbacks, is the best way to achieve the objectives of the United States in Afghanistan and provides the best approach for the United States to achieve broader national interests. NATO policy and decision-making is often frustrating and lethargic. As discussed, the command and

control establishment within ISAF is fractured and complex. But despite these shortcomings, fighting as a broad coalition generates legitimacy and contributes resources and the promise of sufficient resources to sustain a long counterinsurgency campaign. That said, improvements in all three critical counterinsurgency areas are required.

First, for the government to be viewed as legitimate outside of Kabul, all levels of government - national, provincial, district and village - must be perceived by the people as free from corruption and able to meet the basic needs of the people. Part and parcel to an honest political process at the national level is an honest political process at the provincial and district level. Routinely electing provincial governors and councils, and district chiefs and councils will strengthen legitimacy.⁶³ In tandem is the issue of properly resourcing Afghan government institutions below the national level. Provincial and district level governments lack capacity, authority and a functional judicial systems while most of the villages lack any meaningful government presence.⁶⁴ In order to improve legitimacy, ISAF must reinforce and standardize the capacity of its PRTs and work with the United Nations and others to provide essential services where none exist.⁶⁵

NATO resourcing must also improve. Although the presence of 43 nations in the ISAF coalition helps, the effort continues to be under resourced. For six years, the United States' focus on Iraq has had a direct and correspondingly negative effect on priorities and resources for Afghanistan. Because it is the biggest contributor to ISAF, this neglect was imitated by the rest of the coalition resulting in years of under resourcing.⁶⁶ The shift in U.S. national priority from Iraq to Afghanistan, together with the decision by President Obama to deploy additional forces to ISAF, are positive steps and

should set the example for the other ISAF troop contributing nations to improve support. Next, a drastic improvement in civilian capacity and capability must take place to not only improve civil-military unity of effort but to add additional resources for the successful conduct of counterinsurgency and the training of the ANSF.⁶⁷ The relative level of civilian resources must be balanced with security forces so that gains in security do not outpace civilian capacity for governance and economic improvements.⁶⁸ Increasing both military and civilian resources together have effects greater than the sum of the parts and will result in an enhanced ability to achieve the strategy of “shape, clear, hold, build.”

Finally, and most significantly, unity of effort in ISAF has to improve, beginning with the mission. Now is the time to finally eliminate the mission tension between OEF’s focus on counterterrorism and NATO ISAF’s counterinsurgency approach. The new U.S. strategy favoring counterinsurgency over counterterrorism provides an opportunity to improve unity of effort with NATO.⁶⁹ This can be done by combining the international enthusiasm for the Obama administration and new U.S. leadership in Afghanistan with the convergence of the ISAF and OEF missions which has been occurring naturally over the past several years.⁷⁰

Second, initiatives by GEN McChrystal to place U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) under ISAF control must be encouraged. These would not only further unity of effort but would nest counterterrorism within a wider counterinsurgency mission ensuring counterterrorism operations do not threaten counterinsurgency objectives.⁷¹ Additionally, because the NATO ISAF mission has a broader base of popular support than the U.S. – led OEF mission, consolidating any forces, including SOF forces, under

ISAF would have the secondary effect of improving legitimacy of the international effort while reinforcing European support for the undertaking.⁷²

Third, in conjunction with a unified mission, organizational structures must be optimized to achieve unity of effort. As noted by GEN McChrystal in his initial assessment, “[u]nder the existing structure, some [military] components are not effectively organized and multiple headquarters fail to achieve either unity of command or unity of effort.”⁷³ The recent decision to add a 3-star level command to oversee the day-to-day operational issues and to ensure that all U.S. and coalition forces are synchronized so that the 4-star command can focus on strategy and synchronization of civil-military operations at the strategic level is a positive step.⁷⁴

Finally, mission and organizational unification must include improved civil-military collaboration. The entire ISAF chain of command must expand and coalesce to deal with the rapid need in counterinsurgency to adjust strategy and react to dynamic and evolving circumstances.⁷⁵ This is optimally in the form of integrated civilian and military ISAF chains of command, perhaps using the United States Africa Combatant Command (USAFRICOM) model, and not on the hope that military and civilian leaders will cooperate.⁷⁶ The recent announcement by NATO to create a new top civilian post in Kabul as a peer to GEN McChrystal, and U.S. intent to deploy several hundred additional civilians to Provincial Reconstruction (PRTs) and District Support Teams (DSTs) are positive steps that need encouragement to succeed.⁷⁷ Additionally, the Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan (ICMCP), signed between the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Karl Eikenberry and GEN McChrystal, is an important example for NATO. Although a U.S. initiative, the ICMCP aligns the U.S. government’s efforts on the

people of Afghanistan, and establishes U.S. senior civilian representative positions in Regional Commands East and South. These civilians will act as counterparts to military commanders and to integrate and coordinate civil-military efforts.⁷⁸

Not since World War Two has the U.S. had the opportunity to directly influence so many nations. Strong, visionary U.S. leadership of the NATO ISAF coalition can produce relationships and methodologies that transcend the Afghan war. These relationships can be used by the U.S. to further national interests around the world. In the end, using the broad ISAF coalition in Afghanistan is a political reality. It remains to be seen whether or not NATO's participation will lead to success in Afghanistan and whether that translates into continued relevance and survival of NATO. The question for U.S. strategists is whether or not the broad coalition is worth the effort. Ultimately, ISAF is an experiment whose success or failure will inform the future use of broad coalition warfare to achieve U.S. objectives and interests.

Endnotes

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